

# Familism: A cultural value with implications for romantic relationship quality in U.S. Latinos

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## Abstract

Familism is a cultural value that emphasizes interdependent family relationships that are warm, close, and supportive. We theorized that familism values can be beneficial for romantic relationships and tested whether (a) familism would be positively associated with romantic relationship quality and (b) this association would be mediated by less attachment avoidance. Evidence indicates that familism is particularly relevant for U.S. Latinos but is also relevant for non-Latinos. Thus, we expected to observe the hypothesized pattern in Latinos and explored whether the pattern extended to non-Latinos of European and East Asian cultural background. A sample of U.S. participants of Latino ( $n = 140$ ), European ( $n = 176$ ), and East Asian ( $n = 199$ ) cultural background currently in a romantic relationship completed measures of familism, attachment, and two indices of romantic relationship quality, namely, partner support and partner closeness. As predicted, higher familism was associated with higher partner support and partner closeness, and these associations were mediated by lower attachment avoidance in the Latino sample. This pattern was not observed in the European or East Asian background samples. The implications of familism for relationships and psychological processes relevant to relationships in Latinos and non-Latinos are discussed.

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## Keywords

Culture, familism, romantic relationship quality, attachment avoidance, Latinos

Romantic relationship quality is shaped by many factors, including early family experience that sets the tone for future expectations about relationships with romantic partners (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1980; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Culture is one factor that may contribute to romantic relationship quality, but this possibility has received little empirical attention. The goal of this study was to begin to address this gap in the literature by examining the association of one relationship-relevant cultural value, *familism*, with romantic relationship quality. Familism values emphasize interdependent family relationships that are warm, close, supportive, and prioritize the relationship before the self (e.g., Campos, Ullman, Aguilera, & Dunkel Schetter, 2014; Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, VanOss Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987). Sociocultural contexts that emphasize familism values socialize interdependence and comfort with relying on close others (e.g., Friedman et al., 2010; Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Zakalik, 2004) that may benefit romantic relationships, which are typically characterized by high levels of interdependence and serve a special role as a primary source of closeness and support. Based on this reasoning, we hypothesized that (a) familism would be associated with higher romantic relationship quality and (b) that these associations would be mediated by lower attachment avoidance, a stable orientation that reflects discomfort with interdependence and relying on close others. Familism is known to be high in U. S. Latinos but relevant across diverse cultural groups (e.g., Campos et al., 2014). Thus, we expected the hypothesized pattern in Latinos and explored whether the pattern extended to samples of East Asian and European background.

## Familism

The study of familism developed as part of an effort to describe observed differences in the family relationships of people of U.S. Latino and European cultural background (Keefe, Padilla, & Carlos, 1979; Sabogal et al., 1987). Early scholars defined familism as a strong identification with family characterized by loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among family members (e.g., Triandis, Marin, Betancourt, Lisansky, & Chang, 1982). The high level of familism in Latinos was evident in their greater willingness to engage in behaviors that fulfilled family obligations and preferred reliance on family members as sources of social support in comparison with European background counterparts (e.g., Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999; Sabogal et al., 1987; Triandis et al., 1982). Although familism was originally regarded as a “deficit” of Latino culture (Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010; Vega, 1995), familism values are currently recognized to have both benefits and costs for individuals and their relationships (e.g., Campos et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2010; Zayas & Pilat, 2008). In terms of benefits, familism has been associated with reduced risk of adolescent delinquency (Pabon, 1998), higher well-being (e.g. Campos et al., 2014; Schwartz et al., 2010), and healthy pregnancy outcomes (Campos et al., 2008). In terms of costs, familism has been associated with higher levels of psychological distress (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2010) and indicators of inflammation (e.g., Fuligni

et al., 2009) that are thought to arise from the strain of meeting family obligations and/or distressed responses to family conflict (e.g., Fuligni et al., 2009; Koerner & Shirai, 2012; Zayas & Pilat, 2008).

Recently, the literature on familism has extended in new directions. First, the extent to which familism is distinct to Latinos has been examined. After all, family is valued in all human societies (e.g., Hrdy, 1999). The evidence from studies of self-report scales developed to measure facets of familism theorized to be distinct to Latinos (e.g., Lugo Steidel & Contreras, 2003; Sabogal et al., 1987) is mixed. Most studies have found that familism is higher in Latino samples relative to European cultural background samples (e.g., Campos et al., 2014; Sabogal et al., 1987). A few studies, however, have found no mean differences between these two groups (e.g., Schwartz, 2007; Vega et al., 1986). When U.S. Latinos are compared with U.S. East Asians, who also have a collectivist cultural background and an emphasis on prioritizing family relationships before self,<sup>1</sup> some studies find similar mean levels of familism (e.g., Schwartz et al., 2010) and similarly high levels of familism-related behaviors such as fulfilling family obligations (e.g., Fuligni et al., 1999). Other studies, however, find that Latinos report higher familism than U.S. East Asians (e.g., Campos et al., 2014). At this time, it appears that familism may be elevated in Latinos, but the construct is relevant across diverse U.S. cultural groups.

A second direction in the study of familism has been to examine the extent to which familism is linked to one key relationship process, social support. Again, the pattern is mixed. The association of familism with perceived social support has been found to be significantly stronger in a community sample of pregnant Latinas relative to European background counterparts (Campos et al., 2008). However, a recent study of U.S. undergraduates of Latino, European, and East Asian background found familism to be positively associated with perceived support and closeness to family members in all three groups with no significant differences in the strength of the associations (Campos et al., 2014). Notably, both of these studies used the same, widely used measure of perceived social support (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991).

The mixed patterns in mean differences and associations with perceived social support found by studies of familism may arise from the specific sociocultural contexts in which familism values are embedded. For people of Latino background, familism values are consistent with Latino sociocultural norms that connect prioritizing family relationships before the self with warmth, closeness, and support. For people of European background, familism values may reflect a personal choice that is at odds with the broader European American sociocultural context that emphasizes independence from others (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). For people of East Asian background, familism may reflect the East Asian sociocultural emphasis on *filial piety* that is similar to familism in Latinos but places less emphasis on expressed warmth and readily available support (e.g., Ho, 1994; Yeh & Bedford, 2003). Research on variation across cultures that share an emphasis on interdependence and/or independence is scarce, but the distinct features of these contexts may shape the association of familism with relevant outcomes. As we delineate in the section below, culturally normative familism values that emphasize warmth and support availability may be the version of familism most likely to be consistently associated with romantic relationship quality.

## **Familism and romantic relationship quality**

There are several reasons to predict that the particular way of valuing family relationships captured by familism—prioritizing obligations to family, regarding family members as a first source of social support, taking family needs into consideration during important decision making, and frequently interacting or coresiding with parents, siblings, cousins, and so on—may be associated with romantic relationship quality. The emphasis that familism places on interconnectedness and readily accessible social support may lead to more comfort with seeking and receiving social support (e.g., Kaniasty & Norris, 2000). For this reason, familism may be associated with high perceived support from romantic partners. The emphasis that familism places on interdependence and mutual influence may lead to more comfort with interdependence and the mutual influence that typically characterizes romantic relationships (e.g., Bersheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989; Kelley et al., 1983). Accordingly, familism may also be associated with felt closeness toward romantic partners, an element of relationship quality that reflects partner interdependence (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Aron, Mashek, & Aron, 2004).

## **Familism and attachment avoidance**

There is also reason to expect that psychological processes that are predictive of the quality of one's romantic relationships may mediate the association of familism with romantic relationship quality. The attachment behavioral system, for example, is central to psychological processes that have important implications for romantic relationship quality (Bowlby, 1969, 1988; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Zayas, Mischel, Shoda, & Aber, 2011). This innate system motivates infants to seek proximity and protection from others to alleviate distress and enhance survival (Bowlby, 1969, 1988). The ways that others respond to one's efforts to obtain proximity to relieve distress lead to stable expectations about whether others can be counted on during times of distress and whether the self is worthy of others' love and attention (Bowlby, 1969, 1973, 1988; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Zayas et al., 2011). Over time, these expectations about others and self become stable orientations that are typically conceptualized as two dimensions, namely, avoidance and anxiety (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). High avoidance is typically manifested by strategic distancing from closeness as a means to protect the self against relational distress (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). High anxiety is typically manifested by heightened proximity and support seeking as a means to reduce the possibility of abandonment and alleviate strong feelings of distress (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In contrast, those low in avoidance and low in anxiety are characterized as "secure"—comfortable with closeness and also confident that they are deserving of another's love and attention (Hazan & Shaver, 1987). Unfortunately, both high avoidance and high anxiety are linked with poorer relationship quality, including less closeness and support (see Li & Chan, 2012 for review).

Cultural influences on attachment have received limited empirical attention. In infants, there is some indication that the distribution of attachment orientations varies

such that Germany has more infants classified as high in avoidance (Grossman, Grossman, Spangler, Suess, & Unzner, 1985), whereas Japan has more infants classified as high in anxiety (Miyake, Chen, & Campos, 1985) relative to the U.S. In adults, there is some indication that samples from East Asian countries and Mexico report higher avoidance (DiTommaso, Brannen, & Burgess, 2005; Friedman et al., 2010; Sprecher et al., 1994) and sometimes also higher attachment anxiety (Schmitt et al., 2004) than U.S. samples. Researchers interpret these distribution differences as somewhat indicative of the extent to which measures of attachment security reflect U.S. cultural norms regarding appropriate levels of closeness and support seeking. For example, separation from caregivers is more normative in Germany than in the U.S., and the lack of behavioral distress in response to separation by German infants may be overly assessed as high avoidance.

Avoidance has been suggested to be particularly problematic in cultures that emphasize interdependence because of its incongruence with prevailing norms (Friedman et al., 2010; Wei et al., 2004). Consistent with this view, cultural differences in mean levels and associations with relationship outcomes are more frequently observed for avoidance than for anxiety (e.g., Friedman et al., 2010; Lopez, Melendez, & Rice, 2000; Wei et al., 2004). For example, the associations of high avoidance with less relationship satisfaction and less partner support have been observed to be stronger in samples from Mexico and Hong Kong than in samples from the U.S. (Friedman et al., 2010). To our knowledge, the role that cultural values that are normative in interdependent contexts play in shaping attachment and romantic relationship quality has not yet been studied. Anxiety is less incongruent with cultural interdependence and appears to be less culturally variable (Friedman et al., 2010; Lopez et al., 2000; Wei et al., 2004). For these reasons, we also did not expect cultural variation in anxiety. We did theorize that cultural values that socialize comfort with interdependence, warmth, closeness, and support may be associated with reduced avoidance. Thus, we expected familism to be associated with lower attachment avoidance and, given the central role of attachment in predicting romantic relationship quality, we expected that lower attachment avoidance would mediate the associations of familism with indices of romantic relationship quality.

## The present research

The goal of this study was to examine the role of culture in romantic relationship quality by examining the contribution of familism, a relationship-relevant cultural value, to two indices of romantic relationship quality. Based on our conceptual analysis of the link between familism and romantic relationship quality, we hypothesized that (a) familism would be associated with better romantic relationship quality as indexed by higher partner support and higher partner closeness and (b) the associations of familism with relationship quality would be mediated by a negative association of familism with attachment avoidance. We used a path analytic approach to test our predictions in a U.S. sample of participants of Latino, European, and East Asian cultural background. We expected to find evidence of the hypothesized mediation pattern in Latinos, the cultural background group in which the study of familism developed and in whom evidence for the relevance of the familism construct is strongest. We also explored whether the

hypothesized mediation pattern extended to European and East Asian samples that have shown mixed patterns in previous studies such that the two are similar to Latinos in familism in some studies but differ in others.

## Method

### Participants

Five hundred and twenty-one participants of self-reported Latino ( $n = 142$ ), European ( $n = 179$ ), and East Asian ( $n = 200$ ) cultural background were drawn from a larger study of relationship attitudes ( $N = 1,350$ ). This present sample included all participants who reported having a Latino, European, or East Asian cultural background and being in a current romantic relationship. Participants were majority women ( $n = 402, 77.2%$ ), 93.9% were between 18 and 25 years of age ( $M = 20.44, SD = 2.36$ , full range: 18–38), and 86% reported having been born in the U.S. Of the Latino participants, 78% reported Mexican American background ( $n = 111$ ) and 22% reported Central American or South American background (e.g., Guatemalan or Colombian;  $n = 31$ ). A majority of Latino participants reported speaking a language other than English at home ( $n = 126, 89%$ ) and that both parents were born outside of the U.S. ( $n = 95, 67%$ ). All East Asian participants were of Chinese background. As with the Latino sample, a majority of East Asian participants reported speaking a language other than English at home ( $n = 183, 92%$ ) and that both parents were born outside of the U.S. ( $n = 172, 86%$ ). In contrast, the majority of the European background sample reported speaking only English at home ( $n = 140, 78%$ ) and that both parents were born in the U.S. ( $n = 158, 88%$ ).

### Procedure

Participants were recruited at a large public university in California, USA, through its research participation pool. Participants who signed up to take part in the study received an e-mail with a short study description and link to an online survey to be completed at their convenience. The first page of the survey described the study in detail. Participants indicated consent by proceeding with the survey. The last page of the survey provided instructions for receiving the partial class credit compensation. The study took between 30–60 minutes to complete. All study procedures were approved by the University of California, Irvine Institutional Review Board.

### Measures

For all multi-item measures, reliability was assessed with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  and is reported for the overall sample and the three cultural background groups in Table 1.

**Demographics.** Participants reported their age, gender, cultural background, years in the U.S., the birth country of their parents, and the extent to which a non-English language was spoken in their childhood at home.

**Table 1.** Reliabilities for all multi-item study measures.

Scale (number of items)	Overall sample (N = 521)	Latino background (n = 142)	European background (n = 179)	East Asian background (n = 200)
	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Cronbach's $\alpha$
Familism (14)	.85	.86	.81	.87
Attachment avoidance (9)	.86	.86	.89	.84
Perceived partner support (4)	.95	.96	.97	.93

**Familism.** The 14-item Familism scale (Sabogal et al., 1987) consists of three subscales: (a) familial obligation (6 items; e.g., “One should help economically with the support of younger brothers and sisters”); (b) perceived support from family (3 items; e.g., “When one has problems, one can count on the help of relatives”); and (c) family as referents (5 items; e.g., “Much of what a son or daughter does should be done to please the parents”). Previous work has shown that the three subscales of this measure consist of one underlying factor (Campos et al., 2014). Participants indicated agreement or disagreement with each item using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *very much in disagreement*; 5 = *very much in agreement*). Item ratings were averaged to create overall scale scores where higher scores indicated higher familism.

**Attachment avoidance.** An 18-item version of the Experiences in Close Relationships scale (ECR; Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) was used to measure attachment orientation. The ECR is a widely used measure of the avoidance and anxiety dimensions of attachment that has been validated in diverse U.S. samples and found to have an equivalent structure across diverse U.S. groups, including the three cultural background groups studied here (Wei et al., 2004). For the attachment avoidance dimension, participants rated 9 items that assessed the extent to which they were uncomfortable being close and depending on others (e.g., “I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down;” “I find it difficult to allow myself to depend on romantic partners”). Although attachment anxiety was not central to this study, participants also rated the 9 items that assessed the extent to which they fear loss of love and abandonment by others (e.g., “I’m afraid that I will lose my partner’s love” and “I often worry that my partner doesn’t really love me”). Participants indicated their agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Item ratings were averaged to create overall scale scores where higher scores indicated higher avoidance (or anxiety).<sup>2</sup>

**Perceived support from partner.** Four items from the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) were used to assess perceived support from partner. The MSPSS was selected because this measure assesses perceived support from specific relationship sources, including romantic partners. The 4 items measuring partner support assessed whether the participant felt they had a special person who was “around when I am in need,” with whom “I can share my joys and

sorrows,” who is “a real source of comfort,” and “who cares about my feelings.” Participants indicated agreement with each statement using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 7 = *strongly agree*). Item ratings were averaged to create an overall score, where higher scores indicated higher perceived support from partner.

**Closeness to partner.** The Inclusion of other in the self (IOS) measure (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992) was used to assess closeness to the romantic partner. The IOS operationalizes closeness in terms of perceived overlap between self and a specific other because the extent to which another is incorporated into the self reflects the interdependence that characterizes definitions of closeness (e.g., Aron et al., 1991; A. P. Aron et al., 2004). This single-item measure consists of a set of Venn-like diagrams that represent different degrees of overlap between self and other. The degree of circle overlap progresses linearly to create a 7-step interval scale of possible degrees of closeness between self and other with greater overlap indicating greater partner closeness (1 = *no overlap*; 7 = *total overlap*). Participants were asked to select the set of circles that best described their perceived closeness to their romantic partner.

### Data analytic approach

Three steps occurred prior to hypothesis testing. First, the data were examined for missing variables and the distribution of each variable was examined for outliers and normality. Six participants did not report their genders; otherwise, there were no missing data. Results reported here are based on participants with complete data only ( $n = 515$ ). For all continuous variables, absolute values of skewness coefficients were less than 1.2 and the absolute values of kurtosis coefficients were less than 2.0, indicating that there were no problems with univariate normality. There were no outliers. Second, the descriptive characteristics and intercorrelation patterns of all variables were examined by the cultural group. Third, all variables were tested for mean differences by cultural background group using one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs). Omnibus effects of cultural background were followed by pairwise comparisons of group differences using Scheffé tests, which correct for multiple comparisons between groups with unequal sample sizes.

For hypothesis testing, mediation analyses were conducted to determine whether attachment avoidance mediated associations between familism and relationship quality in Latino, European, and East Asian background participants. A path analytic approach to mediation was implemented using the SEM function in Stata 12, which allows for the simultaneous modeling of multiple regression relationships (UCLA Statistical Consulting Group, 2012). Path models were estimated for each of the three cultural background groups, and all regression coefficients were allowed to vary across the three groups.

To evaluate model fit, three fit indices were computed and examined, namely,  $\chi^2$ , root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the comparative fit index (CFI). The  $\chi^2$  statistic provides a global test of exact fit, with good fit indicated by a nonsignificant  $\chi^2$  (Schermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger, & Müller, 2003) and smaller  $\chi^2$  values and larger  $p$  values demonstrating better model fit. The RMSEA provides an estimate of the

average size of the residual, adjusted for degrees of freedom; good fit is indicated by an RMSEA of .06 or smaller (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The CFI is an index of relative fit as compared to the null model and values, which range from 0 to 1, with good fit demonstrated at values of .95 or greater (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Preliminary analyses showed that partner support was significantly higher in women ( $M = 6.00$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) than men,  $M = 5.63$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ,  $t(513) = 2.76$ ,  $p < .001$ . Given this gender difference and the few men in the overall sample, all models controlled for participant gender.

To obtain estimates of mediated effects in this study, estimates of total effects of familism on relationship quality were disaggregated into direct effects (effects of familism on the relationship quality indices independent of attachment avoidance and gender) and indirect effects (effects of familism on relationship quality through attachment avoidance). This product of coefficients strategy for estimating and testing indirect effects is increasingly favored over a causal steps approach to testing mediational relationships because it directly tests the mediated effect of the predictor variable on the outcome variable as represented by the product of the two constituent path coefficients (Mackinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007; Mackinnon, Lockwood, & Williams, 2004; Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). Significance tests for each effect were obtained by bootstrapping. This approach provides increased power for investigation of mediated effects in smaller samples through a resampling method in which the original data are sampled with replacement 5000 times to generate confidence intervals (CIs) around the estimate of each effect (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). Each indirect effect was evaluated as significant if the bias-corrected 95% CI did not cross zero (Preacher & Hayes, 2008).

## Results

### *Descriptives, intercorrelation patterns, and cultural background group differences*

Means, standard deviations, and correlation patterns within each cultural background group are presented in Table 2. The patterns that emerged from these preliminary analyses are described below.

Between-groups ANOVAs revealed overall cultural background group differences for familism,  $F(2, 512) = 5.67$ ,  $p < .01$ , and partner support,  $F(2, 512) = 2.95$ ,  $p = .05$ . Pairwise comparisons of means indicated that Latinos reported significantly higher familism than European background counterparts ( $p = .01$ ) but did not differ from East Asian background counterparts ( $p = .95$ ). East Asians also reported significantly higher familism than European background counterparts ( $p = .01$ ). Third, Latinos reported marginally higher partner support than East Asian background counterparts ( $p = .09$ ), but there were no significant differences between Latinos and European background participants or between East Asian and European background participants. There were no differences by cultural background group for attachment avoidance,  $F(2, 512) = .68$ , *ns*, or partner closeness,  $F(2, 512) = .85$ , *ns*.

In the Latino background sample, higher familism was significantly correlated with higher partner closeness and marginally correlated with higher partner support ( $p = .07$ );

**Table 2.** Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelation matrices by Latino, European, and East Asian cultural background.

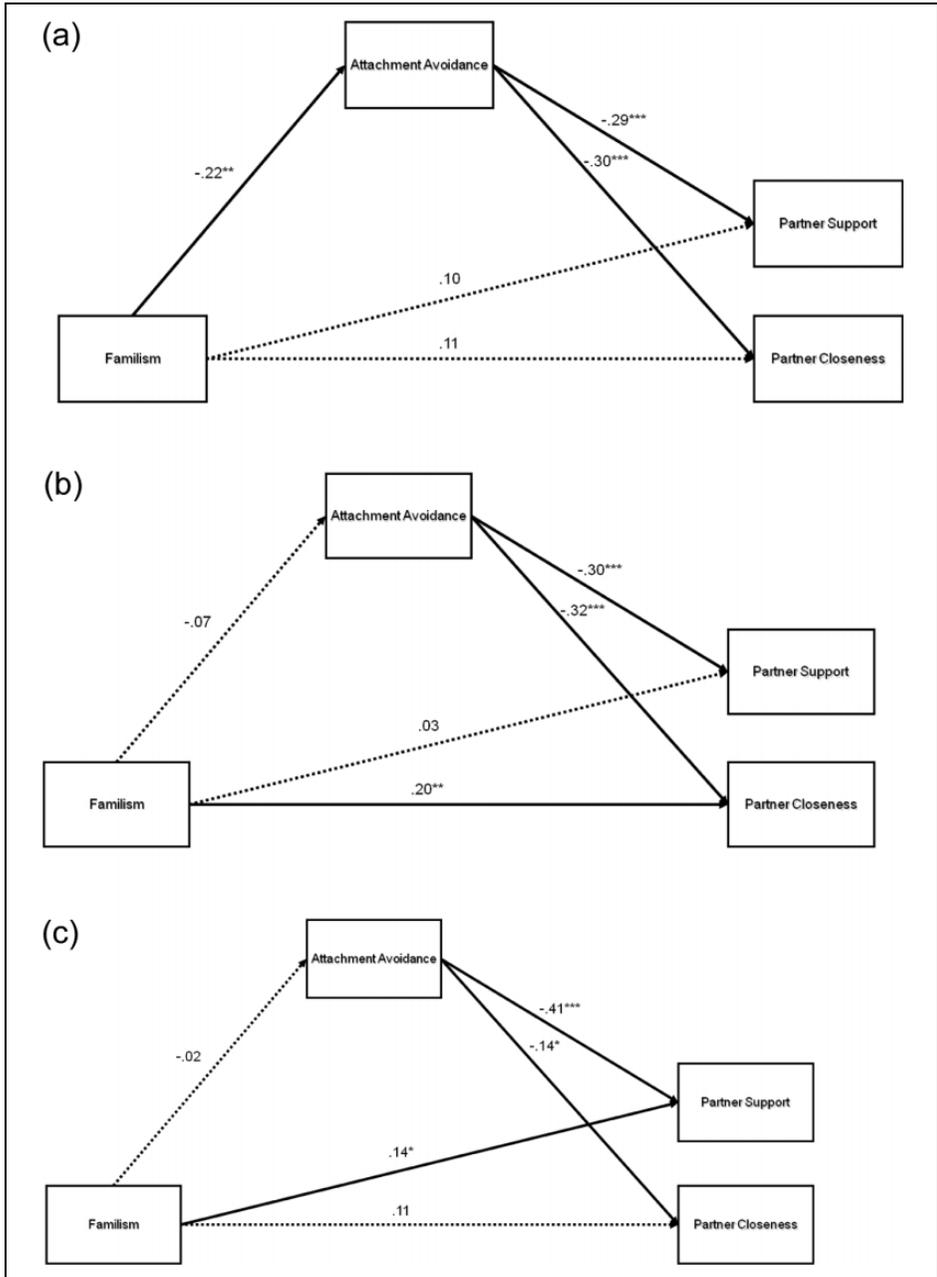
Latino background sample ( $n = 140$ )						
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Familism	3.54	.67				
2. Attachment avoidance	3.15	1.24	-.22**			
3. Partner support	6.05	1.28	.16	-.32***		
4. Partner closeness	5.81	1.53	.17*	-.31***	.21*	
European background sample ( $n = 176$ )						
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Familism	3.33	.60				
2. Attachment avoidance	3.17	1.26	-.06			
3. Partner support	6.00	1.29	.05	-.30***		
4. Partner closeness	5.64	1.47	.22**	-.37***	.28***	
East Asian background sample ( $n = 199$ )						
Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4
1. Familism	3.52	.64				
2. Attachment avoidance	3.29	1.09	-.01			
3. Partner support	5.74	1.29	.17*	-.40***		
4. Partner closeness	5.82	1.35	.11	-.13	.15**	

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

in the European background sample, higher familism was significantly correlated with higher partner closeness; and in the East Asian sample, higher familism was significantly correlated with higher partner support. Higher familism was significantly correlated with lower attachment avoidance only in the Latino sample. Attachment avoidance was negatively correlated with support and closeness for all three cultural background groups with the exception of the correlation between avoidance and partner closeness, which was marginally significant among East Asians ( $p = .06$ ).

*Were associations of familism with relationship quality mediated by attachment avoidance?* Path analytic models tested whether the association of familism with the two indices of relationship quality would be mediated by attachment avoidance in the Latino, European, and East Asian background samples. This model yielded good overall fit,  $\chi^2(12) = 17.89, p = .13, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .05, 90\% CI [.00, .10]$ . Figure 1 shows the model with path coefficients between study variables for each of the three cultural background groups.

Figure 1(a) shows the model and path coefficients for Latino background participants. Higher familism was significantly associated with lower attachment avoidance in Latinos ( $\beta = -.22, p < .01$ ). Lower attachment avoidance was in turn associated with



**Figure 1.** (a) Path model of familism, attachment avoidance, partner closeness, and partner support for Latino background participants ( $n = 140$ ). All parameters are standardized. (b) Path model of familism, attachment avoidance, partner closeness, and partner support for European background participants ( $n = 176$ ). All parameters are standardized. (c) Path model of familism, attachment avoidance, partner closeness, and partner support for East Asian background participants ( $n = 199$ ). All parameters are standardized.  $*p < .05$ ;  $**p < .01$ ; and  $***p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Bootstrapped analyses of indirect effects.

Indirect effect	<i>b</i>	SE	95% CI [lower, upper]
<b>Familism→Attachment avoidance→Partner support</b>			
Latino background participants	.117	.061	[.031, .295]*
European background participants	.043	.055	[−.070, .151]
East Asian background participants	.013	.057	[−.094, .131]
<b>Familism→Attachment avoidance→ Partner closeness</b>			
Latino background participants	.142	.076	[.034, .343]*
European background participants	.056	.070	[−.081, .201]
East Asian background participants	.005	.023	[−.033, .066]

\*Indirect effect is significant at  $p < .05$  (confidence interval excludes zero).

higher romantic partner support ( $\beta = -.29, p < .001$ ) and higher closeness ( $\beta = -.30, p < .001$ ). Table 3 reports the results of the bootstrapping analyses of the hypothesized mediating role of avoidant attachment in the association between familism and each of the two indices of relationship quality. Tests of the hypothesized models for Latinos indicated significant indirect effects of familism on both indices of relationship quality through attachment avoidance ( $ps < .05$ ), providing evidence for mediation.

Figure 1(b) shows the model and path coefficients for European background participants. Familism was not significantly associated with attachment avoidance, but lower attachment avoidance was associated with higher romantic partner support ( $\beta = -.30, p < .001$ ) and higher partner closeness ( $\beta = -.33, p < .001$ ). There was also a significant direct association between higher familism and higher partner closeness ( $\beta = .20, p < .01$ ). However, there were no significant indirect effects of familism on either of the two indices of relationship quality through attachment avoidance in European background participants (all  $ps > .05$ ).

Figure 1(c) shows the model and path coefficients for East Asian background participants. Familism was not significantly associated with attachment avoidance, but lower attachment avoidance was associated with higher romantic partner support ( $\beta = -.41, p < .001$ ) and higher partner closeness ( $\beta = -.14, p < .05$ ). There was also a significant direct association between higher familism and higher partner support ( $\beta = .14, p < .05$ ). However, there were no significant indirect effects of familism on either of the two indices of relationship quality through attachment avoidance in East Asian background participants (all  $ps > .05$ ).

## Discussion

As expected, higher familism was associated with higher romantic relationship quality through an association with lower attachment avoidance in Latinos. This pattern was not observed in the European or East Asian background samples, despite similar levels of familism in the Latino and East Asian samples as well as some evidence that familism was directly associated with partner support in the East Asian background sample and partner closeness in the European background sample. These findings advance the study of close relationships in two ways. First, they provide novel evidence that cultural values

that are congruent with interdependent norms positively contribute to romantic relationship quality and do so through psychological processes (attachment avoidance) that are well-established predictors of relationship quality. Second, they suggest that the way that cultural values operate may depend on the specific sociocultural context in which the values are held.

Our findings are in line with the literature indicating that familism is particularly relevant to the sociocultural contexts of U.S. Latinos. This may reflect the emphasis that Latino familism places on interdependence in the context of warmth, support, mutual obligation, and decision making. These characteristics of Latino familism overlap with characteristics that are known to be conducive to high-quality romantic relationships. For example, romantic relationships thrive when couples shift to regarding themselves as “we” instead of “I” (Agnew, Van Lange, Rusbult, & Langston, 1998), are able to effectively support one another (Maisel & Gable, 2009), and willingly forego the preferences of the self for one another (e.g., Van Lange et al., 1997).

In considering why the hypothesized pattern was only observed in the Latino sample, we offer the following possibilities. First, the literature indicates that familism is particularly relevant for, and elevated in, U.S. Latinos. The familism measure used in this study, for example, was developed to measure a specifically Latino approach to familism that emphasizes interdependence in combination with warmth, support, and closeness. A second possibility is that sociocultural contexts that emphasize familism have social norms that make it easier for individuals to benefit from their personally held familism values or obtain relationships that have characteristics consistent with familism values (e.g., Campos et al., 2008). A third possibility is that familism may be co-occurring with a relevant third variable in Latinos. For example, U.S. Latino culture also highly values elevated positive emotion expressivity (Holloway, Waldrip, & Ickes, 2009; Ruby, Falk, Heine, & Villa, 2012), a factor known to positively contribute to relationship satisfaction (e.g., Harker & Keltner, 2001). It is beyond the scope of this article to tease apart these possibilities, but future studies can build on these findings via multi-method research that combines self-report with direct observation of familism behaviors across diverse groups.

One intriguing implication of these findings is that familism, and perhaps other culture values that are normative in interdependent contexts, may play a role in shaping attachment orientations. Attachment processes play important roles in romantic relationships as well as many other facets of life (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In our work, attachment avoidance mediated the link of familism with romantic relationship quality in Latinos, and we interpret that finding as consistent with our theorizing that familism socializes people to be comfortable with interdependence and relying on others for support. There is much work to do, however, before the role of cultural values in shaping attachment orientations can be better understood. Right now, the findings are few, the patterns are mixed, and the small literature on this topic limits the conclusions that can be drawn. For example, we found no mean differences in attachment avoidance by cultural background. This is consistent with a study by Wei et al. (2004), but others have found that East Asian and Latino ethnic minority samples score higher on avoidance than their European background counterparts (Lopez et al., 2000). For now, the findings from this study can be considered to contribute an additional sample of participants in current romantic relationships to this small literature. More research on cultural variation in

attachment orientation, and the associations of cultural values with attachment orientation and relationship quality, is needed. We also suggest that future research on this topic may benefit from controlling for socioeconomic status or other contextual factors (e.g., political instability/violence and primary caregiver norms) that may disproportionately affect ethnic minorities and have implications for the development of attachment orientations.

In contrast to the pattern observed in the Latino sample, there was no evidence for the hypothesized mediated relationships in the European or East Asian cultural background samples. Direct effects of familism on indices of relationship quality were inconsistent, and familism was not associated with attachment avoidance for these two groups. Again, these patterns may be best understood by considering the distinct sociocultural contexts in which an individual's personally held familism values are likely to be embedded. For the European background sample, high familism is likely to co-occur with sociocultural norms that emphasize independence from others (e.g., Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Indeed, European American women have been found to prefer close relationships that are interdependent by choice rather than due to obligatory social norms (Cross & Madson, 1997). For members of this group, familism values may reflect a personal choice that is less prevalent and less accepted in their sociocultural context. High familism values in individuals of European background may thus be less linked with relationship quality than high familism values in Latinos. For the East Asian sample, familism may take the form of *filial piety* that is similar to familism in Latinos but places less emphasis on expressed warmth and readily available support (e.g., Ho, 1994; Yeh & Bedford, 2003). For members of this group, high familism is likely to co-occur with sociocultural norms that emphasize moderated positive emotion (Tsai, 2007; Williamson et al., 2012) and discourage open support seeking so as to avoid disrupting or burdening others (Taylor et al., 2004; Taylor, Welch, Kim, & Sherman, 2007). In this context, familism may be prevalent but overlap less with the support and closeness characteristics that are desirable in U.S. romantic relationships. Future research that explores these possibilities may lead to a better understanding of how cultural values are shaped by the specific sociocultural contexts in which they are held. In turn, that future research can yield needed insight into the varied pathways to high-quality relationships offered by different cultures.

The findings of the present research suggest that the association of familism values with romantic relationship quality is worthy of additional study. Future research in this area should focus on understanding how familism and other sociocultural factors encourage and/or discourage attitudes and behaviors that make it easier for individuals to manage the interdependence that typically characterizes romantic relationships. Future research should also examine how individuals and couples who are high in familism manage their romantic relationships and family of origin relationships. Couples high in familism may benefit from the strong family networks that are typical of sociocultural contexts that emphasize familism and these networks may provide crucial financial and child care support in the context of warmth, closeness, and willingness to put relationships before the self. However, another possibility is that couples may be overwhelmed by the effort to meet all of their family obligations and/or familism may become a source of couple conflict if only one member of the couple is high in familism or has family members with needs that are particularly difficult to meet.

This research also has implications for better understanding the association of relationships with health. High-quality relationships are known to contribute to well-being and health, including physiological processes implicated in disease states and longevity (e.g., Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001). A focus on the contribution of the sociocultural environment to high-quality relationships is likely to yield additional insights for understanding the link between relationships and better health. For example, there is evidence that U.S. immigrant Latinos have better health outcomes than would be expected, given their objective socioeconomic disadvantages (Markides & Coreil, 1986; Ruiz, Steffen, & Smith, 2013) and social relationships are thought to play a role in this paradoxical pattern. The possible role of familism in this paradox pattern merits additional study and may provide new evidence that culture can facilitate high-quality relationships that are important for health and well-being.

Research continues to show the benefits of familism values for Latinos (e.g., Campos et al., 2008, 2014; Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010; Gil, Wagner, & Vega, 2000; Pabon, 1998), and this has led researchers to suggest that some Latino cultural values, including familism, promote a “Latino social advantage” (e.g., Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010; Holloway et al., 2009). This is a long way from earlier characterizations of familism as a deficit of U.S. Latino culture because of its encouragement of interdependence at the expense of autonomy and individual achievement (Fuller & Garcia Coll, 2010; Vega, 1995). As the paradigm shifts, however, it is important to remember that familism, like any other construct, has benefits and costs. This study highlights the benefits of familism values for Latinos, but familism has also been associated with psychological distress (Schwartz et al., 2010), particularly in response to family conflict (e.g., Zayas & Pilat, 2008). Additionally, the high demands of family, particularly in circumstances of financial distress or high caregiving needs may be costly to self or partner health and well-being. It is also important to remember that not all Latinos are personally high in familism, grow up in contexts where familism is the norm, or have access to their family relationships (e.g., Menjivar & Abrego, 2009).

The present study had a number of strengths, including a theory-driven examination of the link between familism and indices of relationship quality as well as a diverse U.S. sample that included the group for whom the familism construct was developed (Latino background) and two other theoretically relevant comparison samples (European and East Asian background). We also acknowledge the limitations of this work. This was a cross-sectional self-report study of a university sample that is likely to be high in U.S. acculturation. We note, however, that this sample composition may have provided a relatively conservative test of cultural differences. Relational processes can also vary by gender (Cross & Madson, 1997; Li & Chan, 2012), but we were not able to assess the role of gender in this study due to the small samples of men within each cultural background group. While our cultural theorizing does not suggest gender differences, a sample that included more men may have yielded different results. Close relationships involve dyadic processes, but this study measured one partner’s perceptions, and we did not have information about the romantic partner (e.g., cultural background, familism, and perceptions of relationship quality).

For all people, culture frames and filters experience, including relationship experience. In our view, familism is one of a number of cultural values prevalent in

interdependent contexts that may facilitate high-quality relationships. As the study of close relationships moves forward, research that explicitly acknowledges sociocultural context and systematically explores cultural variation is needed to enrich our understanding of human universals and human variation in close relationship processes.

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### Notes

1. U.S. samples of Latino and Asian background may appear similar in familism, but *Asian familism*, termed *filial piety*, places more emphasis on displays of respect stemming from hierarchical obedience (Ho, 1994; Yeh & Bedford, 2003) whereas *Latino familism*, or *familismo*, places more emphasis on positive emotional tone and readily accessible social support (Campos et al., 2008, 2014; Sabogal et al., 1987).
2. Per previous research, measurement of attachment anxiety orientation was reliable across the three cultural background groups (Cronbach's  $\alpha$  range .91–.93). A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tested for mean differences by cultural background, and the correlation of anxiety with familism was examined by cultural background. The omnibus ANOVA indicated a significant difference by cultural background,  $F(2, 512) = 4.96, p < .01$ . Follow-up post hoc Tukey's honestly significant difference tests indicated that Latinos were lower in anxiety ( $M = 3.60, SD = 1.47$ ) than their European ( $M = 3.99, SD = 1.44$ ) and East Asian counterparts ( $M = 4.06, SD = 1.35$ ; HSD =  $-.39, p < .04$  and  $-.45, p < .01$ , respectively). Importantly, there was no correlation of anxiety with familism for any of the three groups ( $r_s = .01-.12, ns$ ). Thus, attachment anxiety is not discussed further.

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